

KNOWING OUR PLACE: DECENTRING THE METROPOLE THROUGH PLACE IDENTITY IN THE LAKE EYRE BASIN

Paul Reader

University of New England, Australia

ABSTRACT Grounded in the experience of working on a community based heritage survey with Antakerinja and Lower Southern Aranda men in the Lake Eyre Basin of South Australia, during the 1980s, some hidden dimensions of knowledge and education are explored through three different epistemes. A deeply personal investigation of what may be lost and recovered from what Connell (2007) has suggested is a “silence of the land” is undertaken. Land enclosure and power exercised quietly to abstract, colonize and concentrate resources is inseparable from northern theory. All humans have an ancestry in the savannah or open woodlands where human agency once maintained a place within ecosystems. Many have rural forbearers who experienced land enclosure in one form or another. Decentring fragments are used to construct a fabric from rural English working class ancestry, childhood learning and art education, three epistemes, and the connections the Men and their family histories. This decentring weakens Northern theories from the peripheries. The reader is invited to share the tensions, the loss and grief, deeper spiritual understandings, awakenings of Christian and ecological connection and consider the validity colonial scientism and urban curriculum from a Southern Theory perspective. Now that most humans are corralled in the conurbations of a global metropole, the reader may also wish to question the fallacies of civilization and whither a globalized urban world is heading.

KEYWORDS class-identity, indigenous, curriculum, adult-education, cultural-education, environmental-education, land-enclosure, urbanization, southern-theory

First decentrings: local, Northern, Southern thinking

Places far away (physically, psychically) from the urban centres -*the Metropoles* of the global economy- hold insights and knowledge completely contrary and inexplicable in urban living. In this article, I want to discuss the kinds of decentring that took place through learning in peripheral environments, observations of my childhood, in, and as, artistic, post-structural events and among people whose connection to the land has been cut or silenced through urbanization, abstraction, creation of class and the transfer of power and resources to elites. A *Northern*² orientation recruits education to this transfer. The fabric of learning from the periphery reveals a resilient hidden world, one implicated in Connell's 'The Silence of the Land' chapter from the book *Southern Theory* (2007). I intend to show, that no matter how destructive the forces of a *Northern* hegemony may be, there exists an alternative, liberating, view emanating from this silence.

A *Southern* shift in my thinking and sensibilities began or perhaps I should say developed, through meeting and working with men of Lower Southern Aranda, Wangkangurru and Antakerinja descent, in the 1980s. Their countries form part of the western catchment of the Lake Eyre Basin, Australia, however their knowledge and access to land had been subject to the kinds of historical silencing, or misrepresentation, as identified by Connell (2007). I learned that these men kept the remains of a body of male-restricted lore (the Law), which also contributed to a different silence through careful transmission and guidance in education and learning of younger men.

Throughout this article I will be referring largely to "the Men" and "the Law" ignoring women's roles and the matriarchal status of older women. My time with the Men in central Australia reveals that a 'Silence of the Land' was not only inscribed on their life histories but also on my own and probably most people who can trace a rural family history.

² Italics are used where geographical terms refer only to epistemic locations or a North/South binary. Northern in this context, may also be understood as Western in some cases.

I went to work in their country, initially as a community development worker in 1980, and later in 1982 and 1983 coordinated a community based heritage project. It was through this project that I fully recognized the Men as teachers, both of each other, and of myself. I am not writing about an Australia indigenous theory, although theoretical aspects arise from time to time. Indigenous literature cited here serves two functions, as a conventional means of supporting premises, and more importantly, as heuristics to reveal publically available aspects of the Law. Over time, senior Australian indigenous Lawmen have publicised aspects of the Law, which others may be reticent to discuss in such a public way. I avoid detailed use of anthropological texts which could otherwise reveal or damage extant practices, still contested in the region under discussion. A persistent question was “What to do?” – “How to maintain or avoid the Law?” These were recurrent questions among the Men in the 1980s.

The *Northern* silence, identified by Connell (2007) is constructed through the objectification of place and the alienation of the native population from it by various colonizing mechanisms. Recognizing this silence reveals the deeper underpinnings in the manipulation of land, economics and social injustice. New theories are required to overcome the impact of silence and the way it continues to sanction dispossession. Recognizing different epistemes, I argue and hope to show, can lead to fresh explanatory power, new directions for our actions and a re-evaluation of the world around us.

Connell (2007) makes four main points in relation to the country and people that are relevant to the discussion here. First, disempowerment arises through the erasure of place and identity. Connell cites Dodson saying; “Removed from our lands, we are literally removed from ourselves” (Connell, 2007 p.195). Forced or coercive migration, what might be called “out-migration”, of the Men and their descendants from traditional country is an important feature of this silencing. Second, there is the creation landed gentries as a means of colonial administration. In the Lake Eyre Basin, this has been largely through the cattle industry, known as pastoralism in South Australia. The large holdings, individual pastoral leases, that are tens of thousands of square kilometres in

area, are now largely unpopulated. Third, there are the historic, often violent land clearances, and the construction of class. Lastly, there is a progressive justification of land transfers and false title. All result in confusion and knowledge recodification by *Northern* thinking.

Anthropology, has been at the centre of *Northern* recodification in the Lake Eyre Basin. Gillen and Spencer (1899,1903) were perhaps the first to construct Social Darwinian explanations for the decline of the 'native' justifying the legal fictions of occupation (Echo-hawk, 2010). Since the 1990s, however, anthropology has advanced Native Title claim processes and corporate identity of native title representative bodies. Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUAs) legitimating non-indigenous use of successfully claimed indigenous land also rest on this work. These processes have further muted the legitimate voices of place, replacing them with Northern abstract concepts of ownership. Abstraction hides what is really happening to land, how elites protect their land interests while colonizing others' places, habitat and bodies.

To overcome such abstraction and silencing Connell suggests 'Sinking roots into the mud of particular landscapes' (2007, p.206) and the application of "dirty theory" 'theorizing mixed up with specific situations ... [to] maximize the wealth of materials that are drawn into analysis and explanation' (2007, p.207). Law, (2004) also looks towards the messy nature of social science data and its inscription, as a more honest approach to recognizing subject's knowledge.

For educational research, examining poorly fitting or messy experiences also allows theory-building outside the established *Northern* episteme. 'Building a Red Dirt Curriculum' (Tjytayki, Minutjukur and Osborne, 2013) exposes the potential hegemonic influence of *The Australian National Curriculum*, simply by emphasising place and the importance of deep spirit in indigenous learning- ignored in the dominant pedagogy. This 'red dirt' argument is for 'The root of the tree' and the growth from the seed and the spirit that need to be developed. This represents a serious epistemic shift from seemingly utilitarian public schooling, which a national curriculum attempts to standardize. "Red Dirt" reintroduces wonder, relatedness, and otherwise disregarded practical metaphysics. Here then, local people are promoting new

theory grounded in place, one already influencing more remote education.

Outside of Aboriginal-controlled lands such epistemic challenges and approaches to schooling have historically been contested and dismissed. Schooling becomes part of the rationale in the submerging or silencing of land in the *Northern* traditions of education. I come back to the issue of education toward the end of this article.

In terms of form, I write this article as a series of decentring fragments, anchors or nodes in a fabric of understanding- against the requirement for a rational-making linearity of form and argument. This may make the text difficult to read as a linear exercise, but hopefully it will offer points of departure in weaving a broader fabric.

Another decentring: spanning space and time?

Using what has been local for me, in my childhood and with the Men and their descendants, I want to discuss the relationship between peripheral and metropolitan sensibilities, including what is relevant to schooling, but situated mostly outside schools.

My experience draws on a geographical- temporal spanning- from what is close to the heartland of the colonizers' domain, the English Midlands, to the colonial periphery- the Lake Eyre Basin, where colonizers' effects are evident in the extreme.

Ecologists, economists, theologians and even pastoralists, such as Sidney Kidman, have long identified the environmental disasters which colonization, industrial power and hegemony have wrought (Idriess citing Kidman 1936; Carson 1962; Slusser 1971; Schumacher 1973, 1977; Jensen 2006; Higgs 2014; Klein 2014). No remedy, no abandonment of the *Northern* project has resulted, instead the disasters are exported even wider as an extension of hegemony. A *southern* episteme, explored through dirty theory, grounded in place and emanating from the Men, may assist surfacing the silenced land and places humans inhabit today. Aware of different epistemes, metropolitan, neo-liberal and other abstractions can be jettisoned, as their centrality and explanatory power wane.

The grounded or dirty nature of my learning and inquiry includes a story of my earlier life-experience, how one inquirer/artist/development worker evolves, meet the Men, and comes to understand life through occupation of a liminal space between the archaic and dominant epistemes.

Connection to place and indigenous knowledge play important roles, in both the dispossession and continuing resilience, and may prevail when the surrogates replacing natural habitat in a consumer-society ultimately fail. The knowing that results, is a woven substrate. Here I touch on some nodes, or intersections in this fabric. These epistemic differences in indigenous learning are also important for others who may be alienated from the living world, or disorientated through the exercise of power, and application *Northern* theories and practices, such as neo-liberalism.

North-south centring in my early years

To understand my receptivity of the Men as I encountered them in a colonial context it is important to understand the wefts and warps constructed in my early years and education. My own background is also situated against various dimensions of Connell's chapter made in the connection to Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class* (1966). Leaving my own country, eager to work and live in different cultures and to recognizing different forms of knowledge, can partly be explained as an attempt to overcome class construction in the search for something more real or even more supernatural.

I was born in Warwick, less than 2 miles from the Midland Oak, a tree my grandfather valued as marking the very centre of England, although there may be no strong mathematical justification for such a view. There was no university at Warwick, Ed Thompson was yet to complete his foundational text or take up a post in the university to be later constructed. Class-consciousness in this place was highly nuanced, a safe conservative parliamentary seat, where voting conservative provided its own identity as a better class of person even among automotive workers and the long-declined former middle-classes. Perversely, in teenage-hood, Thompson represented the alternative, yet newly revered establishment voice. As rebellious adolescents, 'we' shifted left politically

while drinking underage in Warwickshire pubs. As young art students we were taught about “The New York Scene”; we gave expression to “The Free Society”, promoted over the Iron Curtain, and across Europe-part of the propaganda to contain socialism (Stonor-Saunders 1999). Socialism seemed an irrelevant concept in a welfare state at that time. The working class were not the children and women of the 19th Century; they were skilled, but rapidly deskilling artisans, in the motor industry.

My paternal grandfather, of whom I knew little, was a former wheelwright with Jaguar. My maternal grandfather, while employed as factory worker, with a company producing fire-pumps and race-car engines, still resisted industrialisation of his soul. His ideal world was the rural Gloucestershire of his childhood. He found places to teach me about birds’ eggs, while lamenting the loss of hedgerows in the onslaught of industrialized broad-acre farming. Despite the 1950s being the most equitable period in modern British history, class “education” in this urban *metropole* created hidden barriers to confidence, wealth acquisition and its equitable distribution. *Northern* privilege and identity were the right to be seen as a valued worker, a member of a society generously advancing civilisation in even the most ‘barbaric’ places. Like my conservative voting parents, I believed inequality was the price paid for the privilege of being located at the centre of a world painted pink by the British Empire. As teenagers, we derided and sometimes questioned American imperialism, but not our own submission to British class and power. I concealed an internal rebellion against the Protestant work ethic while simultaneously uncritically accepting *North* and *South* as First and Third World with the addition of a slothful, romantic and Catholic southern Europe. My identity remained inherently duplicitous. The counter-culture “revolution” (Bell’s “Counterfeit Revolution” 1976,) and 1967, the year of “Flower Power” submerged, or prevented, any critical challenge to classed identity or place entitlement, on my part.

When I look back however, a *North/South* binary was already geographically inscribed on my primary school’s playing field, as well as in my sense of place and social world. Geographically north was All Saints Church, High Church of England, almost Catholic in its symbolism. The church

provided the only “high art” I knew, paintings, plaster statues and woodcarvings. My memory collides an old and new vicar, very pious, nose in the air, footless beneath his frock, gliding by us upper-working-class children as if on a cushion of air; we who were still there, not even to be seen or heard, despite the racket of lunch recess on fine summer days.

A Modern vicar subsequently sought a new church. The old church, sponsored by early industrialists, intended as a civilizing tool for the new workers was now physically and perhaps spiritually destabilized by World War II bombing. Throughout my teenage years and for many years after, lack of post-war patronage ensured that, once levelled, the church site would remain vacant. This physical and symbolic act of demolishing the church, broke the connection to my forbearer’s religion too, and almost replaced it a Modern scientism, had it not, at the same time, spawned a deeper sense of mysticism and longing for a more spiritual world.

The playing field’s southern boundary, a long hedge and broken-fence, bounded the Grand Union Canal, “the cut” as it was locally known. Speaking to me from the early industrial revolution, coal-hauling narrow-boats would ply the waters, with their “low art” of roses and castles, painted buckets and paraphernalia. The canal was always out of bounds, marginalised. The coal haulers, from “The Black Country” were gypsies, or so I came to believe. As children, we were deeply suspicious of them, but they seemed friendly and would always wave, unlike the vicar. Across this boundary lay *The South*.

Geographically and epistemically north, middle-class Sunday school taught love (that was never practiced) and service as the route to unreachable salvation. The hidden message remained; working class people and their entertainments were never going to be admissible to Heaven, never the less, we should try to be good. Beyond the southern boundary, I felt love practiced with a smile, by the untouchable on passing narrow boats. Heaven and Hell, good and evil, helped inscribe class on our growing beings. Looking back, in school and Sunday school, childhood behaviours seemed always measured and calibrated against a dual standard of Social Darwinism and an industrial Protestant work-ethic, well-explored by Thompson (1966). Class-consciousness, etched on my young being would, eventually

help me interpret class in the wider colonial construction. I remain mystified that north, south and class were so clearly demarcated on my junior school playing field. I cannot help but see a connection to my continuing search for a deeper spiritual liberation from class. I think I would have benefitted greatly from a red-dirt curriculum. As it was my friends and I were clearly writing our own curriculum in the liminal spaces and boundaries of our world, and my grandfather, through presenting the natural world, had opened the door to such spaces.

Under such conditions, valuing both knowledge and sensibility, I chose to enter art school, recognizing in art school a path to this deeper unarticulated spiritual world where life was more than work for material survival. Abram (1996) has suggested that literacy and sensibility are mutually exclusive; literate abstract cultures are unable to respond to surrounding ecologies in the same sensible ways of pre-literate societies. It is a powerful idea that might explain why *the North* appears unable to make an ecological U-turn necessary to achieve sustainability. My grandfather provides a contrary example having sensibility and literacy. Later I would of course encounter the Men who still lived with a preliterate sensibility. With student sit-ins and revolt against conventional teaching, art education in 1968 made its leap into post-structuralism. When I entered undergraduate level at Leeds a year later, we were offered the world, (Literally, handed a globe, without further comment as the only stimulus or project in what would be an entirely self-directed curriculum for 3 years) art education was re-creating, challenging the *Northern* episteme. For a brief period, painting and galleries were an aside to this artistic remaking of the world. Only later would the Thatcher/Saatchi era reinstate a narrow view of art as industry, a search for the sublime (White 2009). My capacity for visual syntheses of multiple knowledges and post-structural entrepreneurship would eventually position me as a community development worker within the Lake Eyre Basin. I had developed the capacity for challenging preconceptions and underlying premises, constructing the new in undefined spaces. I would have to interpret and navigate the space between how the Lower Southern Aranda were trying to teach me about the world and the way the world wanted to teach, or demolish their place and identity through urbanization and assimilation.

Centring on welcome for a purpose

In 1980, eight years after graduating from art-school, the Hawke Labor Government, was working to 'improve' the plight of Aboriginal people through Aboriginal Land Rights where it could, and elsewhere through funding community development. In South Australia, under a Liberal Government, the cattle industry dominated every aspect of remote community life. Placing a federally-funded community development worker at Oodnadatta, pioneered the Commonwealth's initiative for Aboriginal Affairs in the region. Under principles of self-determination, I was officially employed by the Oodnadatta Aboriginal Housing Society (OAHS), which I soon discovered had not actually properly met for some years, because the generally acknowledged chairperson, Sidney Stewart³, was serving time in jail. I got the job as there were few candidates for the post and eventually I was deemed the only suitable person who was prepared to go.

Meeting with small groups of indigenous people in the main street, where many spent their days, I received an informal orientation into Lower Southern Aranda placenames, and the names of edible animals (mostly in Antakerinja/Yankunytjatjara language). This discussion of place and animals moved progressively towards more private conversations, of the "Tukurpa" or "The Dreaming" in settler English. Community development was going to be a work in progress for a long time, but under the Men, I would learn later, the land continually recreates itself from the ancestral life forms that inhabit the region. They looked towards continuity.

South Australian Liberal government officials believed the Aboriginal population would follow service provision to the opal-mining town of Coober Pedy with withdrawal of state services at the closure of the railway. In contrast the Commonwealth policy of "self-determination" had already supported Aboriginal land-rights 200km to the North West.

³ Men of standing are mentioned in this article by name, A period of "Kunmanara" has been observed. It is now recognized that these educators and customary law holders deserve recognition for their parts played in educating *Northern* academic writers, rather than anonymity afforded research participants. In some texts and records Sidney Stewart is also known as "Stuart" although most of his close relatives choose the "Stewart" spelling.

Lower Southern Aranda descendants were clear; they had always lived around Oodnadatta and were not about to move away. This became the general voice of the Oodnadatta population expressed to government agencies. That the OAHS members might be able to organise and were motivated to take on the running of a community, was not evident until many weeks later.

The Men

Then one day, I was invited to an impromptu meeting of men. While being led to the meeting, the acting-chairperson wanted to know if I was a Christian. It was a difficult question to answer for someone raised with Sunday school, materialism and who later cultivated a Buddhist spiritual interest while in Asia. I didn't know and still do not really know the significance of the question, other than at the time I took it to reflect strongly the need to enquire as to my capacity for ethical commitment and truthful behaviour. Perhaps however the question was also to discover whether I held an appreciation for spiritual ways, or alternatively harboured a concern I might be offended by what was about to be revealed. At the meeting the men made clear their position. They had "a story, a big story, right from Uluru to Lake Eyre" and they wanted the land back to which the story gave them title. They were asserting the Tjukurpa, handed down knowledge of creation and all that ever existed, and ever would exist. Seeing the impending handing back of land to the Pitjantjatjara, their position was clear; "We speak English. We work hard in the cattle industry. How come the Pitjantjatjara, who do not speak English and who sit-down all day, get their land back first?" I recognized an element of mimicry in the question; they were not criticizing their Pitjantjatjara brothers, as such, more repositioning the pastoralist outcry, which regularly sought to class non-pastoral workers as lazy natives. It was an impossible question to answer at the time, but clearly tied to the political representation of Aborigines in colonial ideology as simultaneously valueless, and only real or legitimate when dark-skinned, primarily speaking a language other than English and carrying spears. For these men the centre of their world was Uluru, or places closer to home, not Canberra, Adelaide, London or New York. Over the next 3 years I would learn of a landscape and places of deep cultural significance,

including a point only metres from where we first sat-all was connected.

In stark contrast to the unstated, but funded urbanising community development intentions of government sponsors, The Men expressed a clear alternative vision. They wanted the land back. The cattle stations had developed within this place, but a migration out of their country to town had been progressing incrementally since settlement. Changes in the cattle industry, such as from sheep to cattle in the 1950s, pressure for children to attend school in the 1960s, cheap Japanese motorbikes reducing the need for a large workforce, demands for award wages, and now pastoralist perceptions as the threat of land rights, all worked towards continuing land clearance and informal land enclosure. Such enclosure, was enacted through bluff, misplaced accusations of trespass and sometimes implied threat of firearms to discourage further visitation to traditional country.

The SA Government passed a radically reduced bill to establish the Pitjantjatjara Lands in March 1981 - later expanded to Anangu Pitjantjatjara-Yankunytjatjara (APY Lands). This facilitated a place for the survival of the Law, but outside the Lands, across the rest of the arid zone of South Australia pastoral interests were further entrenched with the Pastoral Land Management and Conservation Act (1989). The Act reduced vehicle, horse and camel access, camping near water resources and provided a form of rolling tenure for the cattle industry. The previous bluff of trespass became real. There had always been duplicity in management of the pastoral lease system. Few of the Men felt they could freely travel across country, despite their rights of Aborigines to hunt and camp already written into every pastoral lease. On some cattle-stations, the managers would police this entry clause based on what they recognised as “station families”, warning off other presumed interlopers and strangers, with the result that fewer and fewer traditional indigenous activities remained on pastoral leases.

In manipulating government intentions, I recognize now that we conducted a kind of Freirean community development. The heritage work too resided partially within the radical paradigm of adult education (Freire 2000). The Men were bonded by the older legacy of the Law and its ancient practices. We could not visit stone arrangements, rock-holes

and other sites without being fully attentive to the power of these places and their implications for being.

Keeping open the liminal creative space, resourcing the Men from the sources of funding from heritage grants was always going to be difficult. Eventually the dominant episteme would reassert itself. The double-edged sword of community development would continually swing back to assimilation. *Northern* thinking would require publication of data, a handing over of heritage to the State. *Southern* thinking positioned the Men as authorities, determining who would receive knowledge and how it would be transmitted. Before any knowledge could be transmitted to the State, there needed a process for return of land. The post-structural space could not remain open. I was uninterested in working outside such a space, in an assimilative mode. The state's response was to fund a different researcher and reinstate settler/anthropological (*Northern*) perspectives.

Decentring 2014

Invited to return in 2014, to renew acquaintances with those I had known, to share knowledge with a younger generation, and perhaps help in restarting what was perceived as a stalled development process, I discovered two generations of The Men were nearly all dead, mainly the result of poor health and living conditions in town. An Australian High Court decision in 1992 known as *Mabo 2*, subsequent Australian Native Title legislation, and various precedent-setting cases (especially *De Rose v State of South Australia* [2013]) resulted in a "consent determination" strategy in South Australia. Various claimants (who bore little relationship to those with standing in *The Law and the Tjukurpa* in 1983) had negotiated Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUAs) with the State of South Australia and other parties. As a result, mining, pastoral and other land users have achieved certainty of tenure, severely constricting the common law rights of native title holders. The creation of Native Title Representative Body Corporates (RBCs) created a legalistic system, well beyond recognition of the kind of rights the Men had understood. As Connell expressed it; 'For a while, there was a new burst of optimism about land rights and reconciliation in Australia, though that has been systematically closed down by the neoliberal government since 1996' (2007, p.201)

The survival of The Law in the APY Lands produced new generations of *wati* (initiated men), and as the Men predicted, their grandchildren were among those that kept these traditions alive. A diaspora has since resulted, with families distributed across Central and South East Australia. From these various points, the same question remained strong; “How to get back on to country and maintain the Tjukurpa in the twenty-first century?”

Decentring Epistemes and Narratives

Southern theory does not necessarily assume the existence of any epistemes other than the dominant scientific episteme, in which social science is contextualized. The events and changes in the Lake Eyre Basin, however, need to be considered against competing and sometimes complementary epistemes, evident in the way the Men had acted in the world. These epistemes lead to particular narratives and in turn policies, actions and the exercise of power. Three distinct epistemes contextualizing knowledge in the Lake Eyre Basin can be identified. Scientism, the belief in the power of science, and necessity of scientific conduct is the first. It is science that is used and abused within the Northern hegemony. Appeals to science have been made by mining and petroleum resource companies through environmental impact statements, other assessments, public relations materials and reports. Botanist turned anthropologist Baldwin Spencer who worked with the Aranda (Arrente) and discussed also the Arabana (most likely Wangkangurru and Lower Southern Aranda forebears) as a dying race, cast his work as science, although his photography and sound recordings could just as easily be considered artistic constructions (1899/1903).

The personal impact of experiencing ceremonies never became a subject for written reflection and publication, instead a feigned objectivity cast his subjects as unfit species in terminal decline consistent with social Darwinian theory. In contrast Carl Strehlow, a German missionary, portrayed indigenous society and behaviours quite differently, but such views would prove inconsistent with the Anglophone “scientific” silencing work taking place. (Strehlow J. 2010; Spencer 1899). Health reports were consistent with this work, and also cast in the scientific narrative (Basedow 1926). Despite repeated droughts, vermin plagues, siltation of waterholes, economic arguments continuously focused on the

primacy of cattle or even goats where sheep and cattle were unrealistic, as justified occupation by the colonizers, whereas indigenous land-use, was automatically held by 'science' to be in terminal decline.

Eco-Christianity might be a good label for the second episteme. The foundational work of missionaries became tempered by a pragmatic acknowledgement of Aborigines, their bushcraft and ultimately indigenous beliefs that intersected with Christian teaching. John Strehlow (2010) explores at length the unfolding lives of his grandfather and other missionaries at Killalpaninna, East of Lake Eyre, Hermannsburg in Central Australia, and the difficulties of reconciling Lutheran Church requirements with the isolated experience of remote mission life. Indigenous Christians and other contemporary Christians (for example Bookless, 2009) have sought to grapple with Biblical views of life, land and environmental issues. Christian beliefs sat in stark contrast to Social-Darwinism leading instead to creation of safe havens for Aborigines among Christian or superstitious pastoralists, missionaries, and others who did not subscribe to a Social Darwinist, demise of the 'blacks' or 'natives'.

Eco-Christianity reconciles ecology and Aboriginal beliefs with Biblical Creation; accepting Christ and salvation, as alive here and now – a reconciliation of the Holy Spirit and ecology – perhaps even akin to the same spirit of which Tjtyai spoke in 2013. Early Christians operated with a "common purse" economy. Such sharing is recognizably similar to sharing within indigenous gerontocracies.

The Tjukurpa, a traditional Aboriginal worldview provides the third episteme and this requires much greater consideration for its influence on life in the Basin, resistance to settler perspectives, the alien nature of schooling and urban-devised pedagogy. Morton drawing on Japaljari, Palmer and many others describes it this way:

The core meaning of Altyerre [Tjukurpa] in Arrernte [Aranda] lies somewhere else [beyond dreaming], in the idea of ongoing creation of the world and all that it contains. Altyerre, Jukurrpa and similar terms are fundamentally cosmologies, although they may have other meanings as well. ... When Aboriginal people allude in English to the complete field of ancestral precedent, they speak not so much of the Dreaming, but of 'the Law'. The Law governs the world of all Creation It encompasses not only the rules and regulations by which people live, but also the laws of nature.

Without the Law, nothing would exist or persist. ... By the same token, the Law is everywhere, binding the whole world together in a systematic way. ... It is in effect, a First Cause, a synthetic principle to which all minor causes are subordinate. While manifested through the material world, it is not in itself a material entity. It has been described by anthropologist T.C.H. Strehlow (1971) as 'eternal, uncreated, sprung out of itself'. (2005, p.197)

This was very much how The Men saw it when we conducted the community based heritage survey (Reader 1983). We recorded songs and stories of place, sometimes having a strong correspondence to CSIRO environmental zones. The Tjukurpa appeared to be how the world is created, a geology-geography—ecology-sociology-nature, continuously in a state of becoming, explaining a set of relations between, ancestral beings, who we are, what created or influenced in the landscape, and what we may anticipate to find within it. There is a high degree of respect in these relationships and entities. At particular places the names of ancestral agents are often spoken in whispers. Particular people carry these stories and relationships, which create a homely sense of knowing our place. Knowledge is passed on through progressive revelation, originally through increasing levels of initiation, traditionally involving different aspects bodily inscription, cutting and scarring “cicatrices” (Spencer 1899; Basedow 1903; Strehlow 1947).

Decentring Learning

One contemporary indigenous educator from The Northern Territory describes how knowledge is still regulated and acquired:

When a senior elder knows there are certain people that are limited to a certain level of education. They can talk about a story a painting but there are more deeper stories that are kept for more senior elders, And that its kept there, And that its kept there, it's a top secret stories that make a knowledge, that gives a knowledge, so that that young man, and these young men, they take that knowledge from a senior elder, by observation and participation, not by questions and answers, see? So if I ask a question I am cheating. I have to be and reach that knowledge that this elder has, then this elder can say “very well” you have succeeded. So there are levels that you cannot go beyond except through your own destiny or your own education and the cleverness that is within you. (Guyula 2015)

Strehlow (2010) argues that knowledge in this system was not fixed, but in fact a careful process of deceit maintaining a

gerontocracy, however, it may not be so much maintaining gerontocracy as managing, tagging versions of stories transmitted by different lines. There has also been progressive loss and transfer into non-indigenous forms of knowledge. Hercus (1994) recognised one of the primary reasons for disclosure of stories to linguists and others by her informants was a recognition that many stories were already lost. Loss of language is also impacting on transmission of knowledge.

Tjukurpa or Ularaka, as it is known in the Arabana Native Title determination, (Finn 2012) provides an important orientation with significant explanatory power when relating to a living landscape, inter-species relationships and a lived reality remote from places of *Northern* influence. Spencer (1903b) noted a correspondence between Rain ceremonies and following rain; animal increase ceremony and encounter with the species. In the 1983 heritage survey, I experience two similar correspondences between visits, performances and encounters with totemic species in the following days. Cattle industry pioneer Sidney Kidman paid performance bonuses for successful rainmaking (Idriess 1936; Bowen 1987). Where rain is nearly always a blessing, semi-humorous conversations about the possibility of rainmaking are still broached between pastoralists and former indigenous employees.

This relational dependence between life and land, underpins a practical knowledge too; the bushcraft so significant to survival of both individuals and communities, including pastoral stations and missions, for during at least the first hundred years of colonial 'society'. Abrahm's argument that declining sensibility to the living landscape arises with the development of abstract literacies is relevant here (Abrahm, 1996). Most of The Men were barely literate, but strong in their relational knowledge with the landscape. Among the next generation, those who were literate through some schooling, sometimes retained good relational knowledge of the ecology, but those who were most knowledgeable in this regard, often claimed low literacy, having spent much of their time working on stations, or living in the APY Lands. Knowledge of the Tjukurpa is integrated with well-honed observational skills and sensibilities, backed up by strong reasoning capabilities, working seamlessly to inform day-to-day survival in the land and also stock management.

Today, this differentiation in knowledge and knowledge transfer are increasingly recognized, with land custodians explaining the difference and restorative programs being developed for remnant languages. (Guyula 2015).

It is hard to fix just how this heightened sensibility is implicated in orientation and survival. What I learned from The Men and The Lake Eyre Basin during the community heritage survey is difficult to identify. Whatever it was, and however I learned it, in 1984, as a result, I chose to walk alone from the Spencer Gulf to Oodnadatta a distance of over 500Km to fulfil my continuing inquisitiveness about places in the region- it was almost a self-test of what I had learned.

Decentring Vocational knowledge

“Bushcraft”- what today might be called traditional or ecological knowledge- can be seen as knowledge applied from the Tukurpa. Indigenous men, “Aboriginal Stockmen” and “trackers” provided foundational education for missionaries, explorers, and bush entrepreneurs (Gregory 1906; Idriess 1936; Bowen 1987; Ruhen and Williams 1997; Strehlow 2010). During the heritage survey, travelling widely with Darby Gilbert, an Antakerinja man and lay preacher, added significantly to my access to this relational world, in which all three epistemes informed everyday experience of what would otherwise have remained vast and remote open spaces.

In times past, before moving to town, the Men had worked hard in the cattle industry. They did so largely in return for a basic respect and acknowledgement of their skills, together with rations and some pay mostly spent in the station store, or shared “in town” on holidays.

The oldest of the Men, understood “boundary riders” as a euphemism from the days before fenced leases; potentially dangerous work conducted alone, or in pairs, to “encourage” unbranded cattle (cleanskins) from as far as practically possible beyond the theoretical boundary “back” into the territory of the Boss’s lease. Fortunes were made and lost through this basic policing of multiplying herds. As with many other aspects of pastoral occupation, the legality of practical actions on stations were highly questionable, yet largely dismissed out of hand when called into account (Idriess 1936; Bowen 1987). Between The Men and cattle-station bosses, there appear to be few if any disputes over entitlement to

country. There is a widely accepted protocol in remote areas for people in general to avoid such conflicts because of the inevitable need to support one another in times of difficulty.

In the summer downtime of the cattle industry, ceremonial rights were accommodated, at least until the 1960s, when it became difficult to reconcile traditional and station life with authorities' increasing demands for children to attend school.

At this point in time it is difficult to assess the current state of bushcraft outside the APY lands and also state of the ecology related to knowledge holding. The number of men and women who have experienced living on country in their youth is contracting. Until recently there have been few opportunities to transmit knowledge through visits to country, for the now large diaspora living in urban settings.

Decentring Schooling

Young men have continued to learn in this environment, but it has not been without significant difficulty in maintaining time on country. Sidney Stewart had seen the threat of schooling intervening in the fabric of family relationships the 1960s. Moving to town and curtailing The Law - ceremonial business on the stations - was the solution to preventing children being stolen away from their families by government.

When I arrived in the early 1980s, a community welfare worker was taking responsibility for enforcing school attendance. A hostel provided institutionalised care for the indigenous children of station workers and others, so that they could attend school.

Sidney did not appear to have foreseen the permanence of the move off country, or the pervasive impact of alcohol on the post-school urbanising population, or upon himself. We talked at length about ways to reverse this dispossession, but I was not hopeful at the time.

On average The Men I met 30 years ago had lower levels of English literacy than young people at Oodnadatta today. In saying; "We speak English", the men took pride in what was their second language. They spoke indigenous languages, some including archaic forms used in ceremony. In the 30 year intervening period the use of Lower Southern Aranda, like Wangkangurru before it, has declined. Today there are

only a few speakers of these languages, despite increasing population and introduction of Arabana-Wangkangurru to some South Australian schools (Wilson and Hercus 2004).

Maintaining dual pedagogy inside school and outside school has remained almost impossible. Internet now reinforces global demands as well as stimulating local identity. Yet a “red dirt curriculum” remains an aspiration as Tjtayi attests. Culture is important. The voice of “locals” in respect to remote education and culture has been well explored by Guenther and others (2014, 2015), and that work is not inconsistent with what I have also learned through conversations in this region.

Knowing our place and decentring the *Metropole*

The phrase “Knowing our place,” offers two opposite emphases on power. The first is homely and welcoming; ‘let me tell you about OUR Place’, it can be complete with knowledge of food plants and animals, as provided by God or as a result of ancestral husbandry. The second emphasis is class-orientated and oppressive; if we belong to lower orders we really need to “know our place”; to follow human authority. It is telling that the British aristocracy and gentry not uncommonly have place names as family names, Acton, Lancaster, York and Windsor for example; while Saxon names, some predating the Norman conquest are often occupation identifiers, such as Smith, Reeder, and Thatcher. Place is one important source of identity, agency and power, and can be closely related to the ability to determine the kinds of knowledge admissible in the construction of identity.

The tension between these two forms of knowing place was very much apparent in my experience of working with this resilient group of men during the 1980s, and with their relatives and descendants, 30 years later. On the one hand, the Men would be considered former “Aboriginal stockmen” or ringers or whatever other appellation settler society would give them. What they knew about cattle and the land was generally not on display when confined to town. Outside of town, even by a few metres, these men of Antakerinja, Aranda and Wangkanguru descent became something quite different. They displayed not only cattle industry skills and bushcraft, but many ceremonial rites of senior *wati*, well documented in anthropological texts, but which I will not describe here in

deference for those who continue to practice the Law. (Strehlow 1947; Basedow, 1903; Gillen & Spencer, 1899). The Men's knowledge, constrained both by the Law, and by colonial oppression, stayed with them waiting for fresh opportunities of expression.

A Freirean model casts the dominating pastoral industry as an oppressive settler force, however this interpretation may be modified by the close personal relationships between the men and pastoralists, with whom they shared so many prior experiences. Some of these relationships were buried by time, as well as by the changing pastoral conditions and indigenous Law protocols. The high rates of incarceration by police - usually related to alcohol, domestic violence in town, and retribution for perceived breaches of The Law - remained a legacy of power, interrupting movement and indigenous occupancy of land. The hegemonic overlay of pastoral industry (1860-1960), with its ration economy as a measure to replace native grains and plant foods, created the terms for survival or death. From 1980 with the introduction of land rights to the North West, the closure of the railway, and the increasing influence of mining exploration, this world continued to transform. Throughout the early Twentieth Century, traditional place knowledge had underpinned the difference between success and failure for the emerging settler enterprises; however, the places remain, and with them the potential of succession under The Law. This place knowledge is grounded in the Tjukurpa, as Morton explains:

If a totemic being is said to have created a particular place, that place, or 'sacred site' cannot be separated from the ancestor, and people refer to it in personal terms as 'him' or 'her'. Clusters of such sites coalesce to form estates or 'countries' held by particular family groups who likewise see themselves as consubstantial with the ancestors. Hence a threefold identity between people, places and ancestors. (2005, p.198)

As a result, there remained the continuing contest for power through a liberatory form of learning both for The Men and for myself. I don't think I fully understood, the position of The Men in 1981 when they declared their interest in having the land back. In part they were complaining that the rules of the game had been changed. In the ascendancy of the pastoral industry, cooperating with "white" managers, being deferential, and playing the role of Jackie (serf) to the Boss (Master) in public, balanced an undisclosed respect for the

role of The Men who kept the industry viable. APY Land Rights destroyed these hidden relationships.

Over time, the shift in perspective has led me to reconsider my own learning and education. How I was educated through this contact, and how different educational perspectives may be generated as a result, is significant, not only for remote Australia, but for sustainability and environmental justice more generally.

Being and learning in such places can generate different views of *the Metropole*, its agents and activities. Attempts to provide conventional urban schooling in remote settlements is a tenuous bridge to globalization that Red Dirt curriculum is challenging. The classroom will always sit in stark contrast to the rich experience of the dunes, gibber-plains, springs and creeks, where real things live. It is here that Dodson's remark takes full impact. Dispossession of land is actually dispossession of ourselves.

The experience of living and working with The Men drove this home. I experienced "country" so strongly in the Basin that it causes me to question what had happened in my native Warwickshire and Gloucestershire. Why as a teenager, could I feel the weight of dispossession without knowing exactly to what I should be entitled? This is very different to Marxian alienation. It is not about capital and a means of production, but about missing relationship, belonging in place, power and fairness in our dealings with each-other and the living world of which we are part.

My grandfather and the Men, grandfathers of a current generation of parents, shared a reverence for trees. Whether it was a 400 year oak in the leafy English Midlands or a desert remnant indicating a more sylvan age in the Basin, it was not the tree itself that was important, but the connection that links all present with each other, the living habitat and its origins.

Only a small shift from such sensibility leads into the second episteme. Eco-Christianity lives with "Emanuel" – God with us – almost as tangible and connected in remote open spaces as the desert God of Abraham, John the Baptist, and perhaps of Carl Strehlow. This is not the abstract, distant God of Thompson's millenarian industrialists offering delayed gratification. There is a spiritual connection, we are 'in this

world but not of this world' (John 15:19). 'eternal, uncreated, sprung out of itself', as Morton cited above. Our bodies return to the earth, (Genesis 3:19)

From the commonality of these connections we can return to the scientific episteme for a falsification of the industrial economy. The production of consumer surrogates, iPhones etc. packaged goods and cars provide class identity supplanting real human and living relationships. Provided on extended supply chains there is an increasing potential for imminent collapse.

On the Macumba pastoral run in 2015, just ten people, employees and contractors of the pastoral company, are supposed to manage and maintain a lease area of over 11,000 sq. km. for the benefit of shareholders. An indigenous population of around 350 was estimated on the lower Macumba and Kallakoopah by Lewis (1875). Out-migration, in addition to early killings, were is a direct consequence of colonization and contemporary economics. Macumba is the absolute periphery, calling out of the silence for new sensibility and renewed human agency within the ecosystem.

The Metropole engenders subservience, limits to what we can understand through received abstract concepts; but, at *the periphery* we can become so emplaced, centred and related, that knowledge of our knowledge doesn't matter – abstraction is subsumed by vision and imagination by the weft and warps of life's fabric, the pattern of ourselves coming to the fore, within the geography.

Urban curriculum in rural and remote education remains of contested cultural relevance. The global dimension of the Internet means that significant understanding of gaps and opportunities for communication between *the Metropole* and *the periphery* may be closed, even if by somewhat restricted by bandwidth. It is easier to succumb to the pull of the Metropole, take up online gaming and gambling than it is to monetize local cultural production and conservation efforts. For some in the current generation Christian hope remains the strongest foil against urban degradation in remote towns. As government service provision is withdrawn in favour of online services, local community is in danger of becoming more austere, and ironically, the pressure to gravitate to urban centres becomes greater, just when the

communications and technology arrive which could support a more diversified remote economy.

Sitting on any of the Basin's dry watercourses, where access points to subsurface waters are critically few and far between, what theories really matter? The heritage project in the 1980s enlivened a very different fabric of being. Revisiting in 2014 and contemplating how these connections influence in my life, I see this enlivenment not so much as an anchor to specific places, as to importance of placement, understanding dispossession and alienation. The silence of the land identified by Connell (2007), is one that liberates global capital from local responsibility; the silence is created through policy "deafness" or blindness, ignoring or destroying inconvenient observable realities, such as natives with indigenous rights. Rationalisations, such as Social-Darwinism, or "global economy" help silence the observable. Urbanised and dispossessed we exchange the homely "OUR place" for alienation, loss of identity, becoming instead, subjects classed by others. The moral being present in non-scientistic epistemes is ignored and subservience to supposedly amoral, but often evil purposes are demanded instead. The *Metropole's* urban denizens are derived from rural and remote out-migrations and their offspring, from rural Gloucestershire, from rural China, and even small populations of the Lake Eyre Basin. They represent successful resource transfers to and by the masters, the land-gentries, who seek to outrun the ecological consequences through the liquidity of their abstract actions.

Observing "the whitefella" in the landscape, The Men's forebears in the 1920s and 30s had anticipated the colonizing behaviour, likening it to rat plagues which, having eaten out all, simply collapse (Farwell 1950; Bowen 1987). In the *Metropoles*, climate change and other impending ecological catastrophes can receive no action, and such inaction is marking the progressive demise of civilization. Urban concentration resembles the rats on Naryilco station, which in their thousands dived into the last remaining water-tank (Idriess 1936, p.110). Without *Southern Theory* educational and other policy-writers will struggle even more in writing curriculum relevant in the periphery, or even curriculum relevant to their own survival.

Perhaps it is time just to sit and observe changes in the fabric, including phenomena so insignificant and remote, yet so intricately interwoven that no one thread can be removed without escalating repercussions in the broader design. Such things are beyond simple linear explanation as *Northern*.

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